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Why Women Want to Play Sports: Identity, Culture, and Motivation

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Why Women Want to Play Sports: Identity, Culture, and Motivation

Abstract

This paper is part of a series of research dedicated to specific issues uncovered in sports-for-peace programs. Other research has focused on cross-cultural issues, for example. In this research project, the authors were interested in how to encourage the inclusion and promotion of women in all sports around the world. The authors sought to discover who encouraged the women to play competitive sports, how long they had been playing sports, the barriers they encountered when playing competitive sports, and how they felt about identifying as sportswomen at the higher levels of competition. The authors used an on-line anonymous survey instrument and asked Division I college volleyball coaches to forward the link to their teams for voluntary participation in the study. While the authors review the literature as well as the recent history of many competitive sports for women, volleyball was chosen as the focus for the on-line survey because it is one of the most common sports women can play in college at the very competitive Division 1 level in the U.S. The survey questions were both demographic and open-ended in nature. The authors surveyed 149 women who played college-level sports. Narrative analysis was used to understand the themes presented in the open-ended question data. The authors propose that family dynamics, availability of sports programs, and gendered discourses have a combined effect on women's orientation to particular sports, the women's long term dedication to the sport, and at the competitive level at which they play. These findings should be considered before inviting women into sports-for-peace programs. The findings have global implications for inclusion and promotion of women in sporting activities. This research will be of interest to coaches, sportswomen, peace educators, gender educators, as well as practitioners who run international sports-for-peace programs.

Keywords: *competitive sports, women, gender equality, sports-for-peace, family*

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Why Women Want to Play Sports: Identity, Culture, and Motivation

Linda M. Johnston and Karen Weatherington

Peace education programs have begun to advocate sports as a valuable part of the toolkit for promoting peace (Stura & Johnston, 2014). Interdisciplinary research in this area is capturing attention. As an example, previous research published in *Peace and Conflict Studies* has focused on sports in post-conflict societies (Cardenas, 2016). This growing line of research will be of interest to coaches, sportswomen, peace educators, gender educators, as well as practitioners who run sports-for-peace programs.

Women are increasingly being included in these sports-for-peace programs without a comprehensive understanding of what motivates and sustains women to play sports, especially competitive sports. While the authors of this paper reviewed research relative to women playing sports in general, we chose to focus an on-line survey solely on female volleyball players. Volleyball is one of the most common sports women can play at the very competitive Division One collegiate level and, therefore, offers a unique insight to the reasons why women play competitive sports, as well as some of the common barriers they encounter. In this study, the researchers surveyed women in the U.S. who play Division One competitive Volleyball at the collegiate level as a means for better understanding their motivations to participate in sports, as well as their identities as sportswomen.

Women playing competitive sports of all kinds is not a new phenomenon, yet there is a surprising lack of research to inform what motivates and sustains women's enthusiasm for sporting activities, especially competitive sports. A historical review of women playing competitive sports of all kinds is necessary. For example, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was founded in 1943. Crowds lined up to see these skilled athletes play ball. The 1992 movie, *A League of Their Own*, tells the story of some of the teams in the league. In 1988, the National Baseball Hall of Fame opened an exhibit entitled "Women in Baseball." Carr (n.d.) reports, "On an average November day, the Baseball Hall of Fame has around two to three hundred visitors. The day the exhibit opened, over 1,100 people came through the doors." More recently, sports have been used as a tool to promote gender equality in developing and post-conflict countries and has been included as part of the Millennium Development Goals (Sport for Development & Peace, 2008). The interest in women's sports hasn't changed, nor has the

number of women who want to play sports. What does change periodically and across the globe are the opportunities available to women who choose to partake in sports programs. These changes in women's participation are the focus of several research studies. Sarah Hillyer's (2014) work in Iran, regarding coaching women's softball teams, exemplifies the role that sports can play in promoting peace and gender equality, as well as serves as one more tool in a peace education toolkit.

Norms for women playing sports have been rapidly changing around the globe. Cahn, in her dissertation work, reflected on several themes related to women in sports:

Precisely because women in sport crossed into a "male" realm, both critics and advocates articulated their beliefs about femininity, the female body, and the meaning of womanhood, leaving a rich body of historical evidence on how commonsense beliefs about womanhood and manhood are made and altered over time. By looking at how athletes, educators, sporting officials, promoters, and journalists have clashed and compromised over gender issues in sport, we can learn something about how ordinary and influential people create society's gender and sexual arrangements, and how their actions are conditioned by the circumstances and beliefs of their time. (Cahn, 1994, p. viii)

Cahn (1994) talks about how Martina Navratilova took the sports world by storm and epitomized some of the changes happening in world sports, and the subsequent changes in the identities of women. A description of Cahn's book sums up these challenges facing women in their sports identity:

Susan Cahn's story of how sport has changed women's lives and women have transformed sport is an important chapter in the wider history of women's struggles to define their role in the twentieth century. For the women who dared to compete, participation in sport enabled them to expand the boundaries of women's activities and to claim that strength, skill, physicality, and competitiveness could be authentic attributes of womanhood. This is the legacy they passed on to the new generation of women for whom athleticism is becoming a way of life. (<https://www.amazon.com/Coming-Strong-Gender-Sexuality-Twentieth-Century/dp/0674144341>)

Other normative changes that have been occurring recently include breaking stereotypes on the effect of sports on women's health, the introduction of women into the sports-for-peace programs, sports programs opening for women in areas not previously accepting of women's programs, participation of women in sports with very little support or promotional effort, the installment of female coaches, and the provision for appropriate leadership on women's sports teams.

In reviewing the literature about women and sports, researchers can approach the subject matter in many ways. One direction might be to point out "the first" in women's sports. For example, Costa (2002) discusses the first African-American woman to win a Winter Olympic Games' gold medal in bobsledding at the Utah Olympics. Another approach might be to examine the stresses that women encounter when they wish to participate in sports. Others would be to investigate why women quit playing sports, or the role of coaches in encouraging women to participate. Whatever the lens through which this topic is viewed, one thing is certain: more women are participating in sports globally, but research is lacking in the examination of the personal and cultural barriers they face.

Some of the barriers to women playing sports have been delineated in previous studies. For example, Stirling and Schulz (2011) interviewed female footballers (soccer) in England. Overcoming parental concerns is the first hurdle that young girls face. The authors also discovered the importance of positive and early male influences on the women's decision to play football. Girls' access to football has been increasing in England at the primary school level, and football is one of the fastest growing sports in the country. Once the girls start secondary school, there is no football program available for them. Furthermore, as the girls become adults, cultural and gendered attitudes take over, and sportswomen behaviors are perceived as tomboyish and unsuitable behavior for women. The authors claim that these barriers to women's participation have changed little since the 1960s, and that male norms still define the sport.

Other barriers to women's participation in sports have also been described in the research. Harkness (2012) noted that while participation of women in sports in Qatar is on the increase, it is still low. Issues related to religion, family, reputation, and gender still hold women back from full participation. The Harkness study particularly looked at reputation and found that playing sports might damage the honor of the family, particularly in mixed-gender settings and when the tenets of the hijab might not be strictly followed. These issues were enough to refuse

participation. Interestingly, all participants in this study said that religion was not the reason for non-participation; “All interpreted Islam as wholly supportive of female athletic activity” (Harkness, 2012, p. 2,177). The barriers were observed as cultural. “It is not that females are prevented from playing sports, it is that they jeopardize their reputations by doing so” (Harkness, 2012, p. 2,178).

Similar research examined additional cultural barriers. Heydarinejad, Boushehri, and Amraei (2012) identified barriers to women’s participation in sports at a university in Iran. They grouped the factors into several categories: economic, socio-cultural, personal, and family. Their findings show that more husbands and families are supporting sports participation for their female members, and that these factors weigh less in their minds than economic and socio-cultural factors. The authors pointed out that sport is now seen as one of the social rights, and that cultural changes promote gender equality. They also referred to the importance of female coaches to the success of these sports programs. Other researchers noted the challenges that low-income parents face when encouraging their children to participate in sports (Fredricks, Simpkins, & Eccles, 2005).

Barriers to women in sports are also focused on a perceived gender divide. Velija and Malcolm (2009) studied female cricket players in the United Kingdom. Their research concentrated on why female participation in this sport has stagnated. They discovered that most women entered the game of cricket through a mixed-sex league. The lack of acceptance into these male teams was often a negative experience, with the males focusing on the women’s perceived playing ability (or lack thereof). The reactions came in the form of verbal abuse, physical intimidation, and innuendo. The authors claimed that the women accepted this reaction and, in a sense, internalized it, and thereby perpetuated their outsider status in the game. Schmalz and Kerstetter (2006) pointed out that sports are gender-segregated early on, with children being very aware of the divide: baseball for boys, softball for girls.

The gender-typing of sports as either masculine or feminine is resilient to change (Hardin & Greer, 2007) and remains into adulthood with “powder puff” divisions even in such sports as stock car racing (Thompson, 2010). Theberge and Birrell (1994) warned against the “fitness” industry as well as feminized sports, such as synchronized swimming and gymnastics, as not solving the problems of true inclusion in sports. Other school-related studies found that sports participation was unrelated to perceived discrimination from adults at the school, and it was

hypothesized that Title IX may protect against such discrimination from adults but not necessarily from peers (Knifsend & Graham, 2012), and still did not resolve the issue of equality vs. equity in sports, which then serves to support the status quo (Hoeber, 2008). Other studies have found that the hegemonic environment that supports men is institutionalized in sports and may be impermeable to change without very conscious effort on the part of stakeholders and decision-makers (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Furthermore, other researchers found problems when the notion of equality in sports did not lead to equity. For example, Hardin and Whiteside (2009) stated: “Problems arose, however, as participants reconciled the quest for equality with gender ideology that positions women as not equal because of their failure to be the same. Thus, women have not earned the right to an equitable allocation of resources” (p. 271). Dyer (1984) offered that there are arguments made against women participating in sports related to their physical, physiological, and psychological shortcomings, but also made economic arguments about women’s sporting events lacking attraction to the public.

Krauchek and Ranson (1999) further found that women who do enter the male sports world, on male terms, see the harassment as just something that happens in sports and thereby acquiesce to the male power norm. The authors say that those women are less likely to change the sports environment. Men who benefit from this model are also less likely to change. Change, the authors say, will come from various factors, including recognition by men that the model needs to change, from women insisting on playing by their own rules, by women who relish the hard work and competition, and women being proud of their strong, athletic bodies. Burke (2010) also added that the acceptance of male notions of excellence raises difficulties for women to access sporting opportunities.

The barriers women face has been studied more than the positive factors for female participation in sports. Some of those studies are reviewed here. For example, Spink (1995) examined team cohesion as a predictor of whether female athletes would continue with a sport. He found that those women who perceived a greater amount of team cohesion were more likely to continue with the sport the following year. These individuals were more likely to see the team as a social unit. The more elite female athletes were more likely to perceive team social cohesion with their team, whether the sport was recreational or elite participation. This study correlates with previous work that found that those who participate in recreational sports tend to recruit their teammates based on friendship as well as their skill level (Landers, Wilkinson, Hatfield, &

Barber, 1982). Perceptions of team cohesiveness have also been previously shown to predict dropout behavior (Spink & Carron, 1994). The need for affiliation has been shown to be a strong motivator for females to be involved in a team sport (Ryckman & Hamel, 1992).

Harkness (2012) pointed out that culture is constantly shifting and releasing more opportunities for women in sports. He stated: “In 2008, the UAE sent its first female athlete to the Olympic Games in Beijing. In 2012, Qatar and Saudi Arabia followed suit” (p. 2,178). All these changes pave the way for other women to participate. Legislation in Australia aimed at breaking down barriers for women in sports, does at least serve to acknowledge female athleticism and can be a starting point for cracking other gendered sports barriers (Burke, 2004). Christian (2004) stated that by their very existence, female athletes help us critique what it means to be a woman. The cultural conflicts that exist within multicultural teams also give researchers insight into the need to examine culture within sports-for-peace programs, in particular (Stura & Johnston, 2017).

Other studies point out that with the right encouragement, women can continue playing sports. Coakley and White (1992) found that many young women quit playing sports long before they left school, even if they had a positive experience during school. Those women who continued playing sports had a close friend or family member who participated and provided the “sponsorship” and encouragement needed for them to continue. An interview study of female Division One head coaches in the U.S. demonstrated the importance of parental influence in normalizing the sport experience of young women, especially in terms of gender (Dixon, Warner, & Bruening, 2008). Guillet, Sarrazin, Fontayne, and Brustad (2006) also found a relationship between the value an athlete ascribed to the activity and their staying power: the higher their level of competence, the lower their plan to quit the sport. Furthermore, in this study, gender-role identification only had a distal influence on dropping out. Pacheco, Mas, Olivárez, and Avila (2012) did not report parental influence as a major factor in the college-age female athletes they studied; they found the remaining years of eligibility to have the most impact for them to participate in sports. In their research, Gonçalves, Carvalho, and Light (2011) focused on the positive attributes that kept women playing sports. They were able to identify several factors: long periods of time with one sport to foster a sense of belonging and worth, development of relationships on the team, and the development of a relationship with a coach. These stable settings allowed the women to develop into adult athletes. The athletes they interviewed also

recognized the role of the coach in shaping the beneficial climate. While coaches cannot entirely prevent all the myriad of reasons for athletes quitting their sport, research by Stewart and Taylor (2000) has shown that coaches can have a positive impact on injury prevention and promoting positive coaching behaviors. van Eekeren and Vermeulen (2011) further emphasized the importance and relationship of the local context of coaching both in terms of the locale and sport activity.

Research Methods

The authors developed an on-line survey that included both demographic and open-ended questions. While the focus of the survey was on female collegiate volleyball players, the authors also asked about other sports played by the same athletes. It was immediately clear from speaking to coaches that it is not uncommon for women at this athletic level to have played or still be playing other competitive sports. The authors contacted Division One Volleyball coaches across the U.S. and sent them the survey link. The coaches sent the link to their teams, asking for their voluntary participation in the study, with no knowledge of their team members' actual participation.

The first set of questions on the survey were about demographics: age, length of time playing sports, age at which they began playing sports, sports they played, and why they chose a specific competitive sport. The authors analyzed these questions by numeric methods.

The second set of questions on the survey were open-ended. The authors asked about influences that led the women to play sports, challenges and barriers they encountered, identity issues, and their level of commitment to the sport. The responses to these questions were analyzed using narrative analysis. The authors examined the key points raised by the participants, selected representative responses to demonstrate the key points, and discussed the significance of the responses to each question. Upon completion of the initial analysis of the narrative section, three key themes were identified.

Results

Numeric Data

A total of 149 women responded to our survey. They ranged in age from 17 to 50. The average age in years was 19.9. Most participants (86.6 percent) were between the ages of 19 and 21. In terms of ethnicity, 86.6 percent of them were Caucasian; 2 percent were Hispanic; 6.7

percent were African-American; 3.4 percent identified as Bi-racial; .7 percent identified as Multi-racial; and .7 percent were Pacific Islander.

Participants began playing their sport between the ages of 3 and 15, and the average starting age was 6.6. They had played their sport a duration of 5-45 years, with an average of 12.9 years.

Most, 97.3 percent, of the women played volleyball (the authors specifically sent the survey link to volleyball team coaches for distribution). We also got responses from .7 percent who played basketball, .7 percent who played soccer, and 1.3 percent who played other sports, indicating that some of these female athletes also played other sports.

At the onset of the survey, following the demographic questions, we asked the participants if the possibility of a sport-related scholarship determined their choice of a sport. Over half the participants responded that scholarships were a determining factor (10.9 percent said “not at all”; 9.5 percent said “not a lot”; 23.1 percent said “some”; 30.6 percent said “very much”; and 25.9 percent said “a lot”). We then asked if their skill set determined their choice of a sport. Over 80 percent admitted that skills were a large determinant (1.4 percent said “not at all”; 2.7 percent said “not a lot”; 14.3 percent said “some”; 42.9 percent said “very much”; and 38.8 percent said “a lot”). Lastly, we asked if the cost of participating in the sport determined their choice. These findings were very mixed (18.4 percent said “not at all”; 38.1 percent said “not a lot”; 18.4 percent said “some”; 10.2 percent said “very much”; and 15.0 percent said “a lot”).

Narrative Data

The remainder of the questions allowed for open-ended responses. Narrative analysis was used to discover themes within the responses (Johnston, 2005). In this study, the authors used narrative analysis both as a tool for analysis, to discover more about the sportswomen, and a way to provide a window into how they saw themselves. We wanted these women’s responses to our inquiries to be their versions of reality and of themselves. While the researchers asked specific questions regarding their sporting activities, they left the questions open-ended to encourage the participant’s elaboration and thoughtful response. The authors determined the themes based on the women’s responses both in terms of the number of times they mentioned a theme, as well the way they described how the theme affected them and their participation in sports.

First, we asked the women if there was any family member/friend/mentor or anyone else with whom they had interactions who made them aware of their challenges as a “sports-woman.” If so, who was it and what did he/she say? Participants reported that individual family members made them aware of the challenges they would face as a sports woman. Participants mentioned their mother or father in equal numbers. Interestingly, if they mentioned their mother, it was mostly in response to two things: changes in Title IX to support female athletes, or reflections on when they were a young female athlete. A few participants also mentioned that their mothers were, or used to be, coaches for sports teams. For example: “My Mom helped me to realize that women were going to be treated unequally in a world that is dominated by men.” If they mentioned their father, it was usually about the skills that athletics could teach you about life. One said: “My father has played a huge role in my life, not just with sports, but also with me becoming a young woman. He has always taught me to work hard and know how special it is that I have the opportunity to play volleyball at the level that I do.” Participants also mentioned the importance of having older siblings who successfully played sports, especially older sisters. One participant said: “My sister played sports before I did and got me into volleyball. I saw what she went through and could learn from her mistakes and her as an athlete.” Other athletes mentioned brothers, grandparents, cousins, coaches, and friends of their parents who spoke to them about the challenges they would face.

We then asked the participants if they had ever faced any major challenges in social acceptability because of choosing sports as a career option. The respondents felt that being on a team helped them make friends. Being involved in athletics created an immediate circle of people with whom to interact, both on their team and among other athletes. In college volleyball, which is a Fall sport, that interaction started immediately upon arrival on campus. One participant said: “I have even more friends that play other competitive sports, and we all relate to our crazy schedules.” Other participants talked about the personal sacrifices they made to be involved in athletics. One person summed it up by saying: “I sacrifice a lot of time I could spend with friends and family in the summer.” Another said: “Most of my friends are athletes so they understand the demand of my schedule and commitment.” Others bemoaned that they didn’t have any friends because of sports or couldn’t spend any time at all with their friends during their primary sports season. Participants also talked about the perceived prejudice they encountered because of being an athlete. One said: “Athletes are also tagged with the ‘dumb

jock' stereotype. Non-athletes do not understand the demands of athletes and often criticize us for having scholarships." Or, "You must have a limited mentality." Another reported that she didn't like: "Being stereotyped as solely caring for my sport versus my schoolwork or academics." One added: "I struggle with being an honors student and an athlete and being accepted by one group as part of the other." Others talked about how it was difficult to maintain friendships with non-athletes. A participant said that friends get upset "when I don't have time to spend with them." Yet others talked about the changing and more positive views toward athletes. One participant reported that: "I feel like many people are very accepting of athletes today because many people play sports or have played sports at one point in their life and know what it is like."

We then chose to focus more on identity issues. We asked specially about their identity as a sports-woman. The study participants answered this question overwhelmingly positively. While they did recognize the challenges in terms of maintaining a tough schedule, balancing going to school and the demands of participating in their sport, participation in a sport being harder than they thought it would be, and missing out on many social activities, most said that they wouldn't change a thing. One said: "It is an honor and a privilege to still be playing volleyball." Several mentioned the increased honor of playing at the Division One level, how only a few select people get to play at that level, and how that was a real source of pride. Still others talked about how playing sports gave them more confidence in other areas of their lives. They had gained a lot of self-esteem, determination, responsibility, respect, time management, and discipline from playing sports. One summed it up by saying: "I wouldn't have it any other way!" With all these positives, there were also negatives. A couple of participants noted that even with their success in sports, men's sports still got more attention at the school and in the media. They also had to wait for fields until the men's sports finished or that men's sports always got priority. Also, men's sporting opportunities could extend beyond college, but there were very few opportunities for women to play professionally. Another talked about perceived sexual orientations: "People think we're lesbians."

The next questions were designed to ascertain their level of commitment to their sport. At what level did you play volleyball (competitive, intramural, club, etc.)? At or from what age? If you quit playing volleyball, at what age did you quit? Most of the participants started playing volleyball at age 11-12. A very few started as early as four or five. When they started at 11-12, it

was usually in a recreational league, or if they were lucky enough for the junior high school to have a team, they played there. Most have been playing ever since, and they have grown in level and competitiveness as they have aged. The majority have played volleyball all the way through. So, most of them have been continuously playing the sport for 10-15 years at the competitive level. Most are now playing Division One volleyball. Some are now even coaching younger teams.

If women in the study played another sport, we asked the same series of questions regarding their long-term commitment to the sport. One responded that she played soccer from 4-17 years of age and quit because of a knee injury. Another played basketball; she started playing basketball at five years of age and played until her sophomore year, at which time she switched to volleyball. Two others responded that they had played softball. One has played softball all her life, especially with her older sisters. She played softball until high school, at which time she discovered volleyball. The second participant only started playing softball four years ago.

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings in this study correlate with previous research in many ways. Using narrative analysis, the authors have thematically grouped these findings into three categories: support, hurdles, and interest. Each of these categories should be considered before inviting women into sports-for-peace programs.

The first category is called “support.” Just like previous research by Heydarinejad, Boushehri, and Amraei (2012) and Velija and Malcolm (2009) has shown that women who engage in sport activities have the support of their families, particularly the men in their immediate family group. The participants in our study had similar responses, particularly appreciating their male family member’s support of their sport skill set. In addition, the women in our study appreciated their mother’s support—particularly if their mother had also played a sport—or mentioned the advancement of legislation promoting equal sporting opportunities for women. This support of women paving the way for other women is consistent with the Harkness findings (2012) in the United Arab Republic, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Lastly, women in our study did rely on the support of other women, both on their teams and from likely persons, like older sisters who had played sports, or women who could sponsor them in the sport and normalize the cultural sporting experience. This is in line with the earlier findings of Coakley

and White (1992). For the sportswomen in our study, the cohesion of the team was very important to them. The team members were some of their closest friends, particularly because the fellow team members understood their interest in sports as well as their schedule of activities and the sacrifices they had made to partake in sports. These factors created very close bonds among the female athletes. This finding also correlated with earlier research by Spink (1995), Spink and Carron, (1994), Ryckman and Hamel (1992), and Landers et al. (1982). Lastly, the importance of the coach was recognized by many of the women in our study, particularly in the forming of a supportive community. This was like the research findings of Stewart and Taylor (2000), as well as, van Eekeren and Vermeulen (2011).

The second category of responses the authors identified as “hurdles.” Previous research by Malcolm (2009), Hardin and Greer (2007), and Krauchek and Ranson (1999) illustrated various types of hurdles women face, especially when they try to play a sport typically identified as a male sport, like cricket, football, or baseball. These ventures into male-perceived sports were often met with direct criticisms of the women’s skills and abilities. In addition, women who took part in these sports subjected themselves to sometimes extreme gender discrimination, with calls of tomboyish-ness, thinking their behavior was not feminine, or presuming they were lesbian. These findings related to discrimination have been demonstrated in previous research by Stirling and Schultz (2011). Additional hurdles we identified were also consistent with previous research. For example, women having to choose a sport in which opportunities were available to them. Stirling and Schultz (2011) found that football (soccer) was not even a choice for women in the UK after primary school. The participants in this study had to choose sports for which scholarships were available so that they could continue to play sports into the college years. For over half of our participants, the availability of scholarships was a determining factor. Cost of participation was also a determining factor for many of our participants, which was in line with previous research by Fredricks, Simpson, and Eccles (2005).

The third and last category the authors identified was “interest.” The women in this study were proud to be identified as sportswomen. They were proud of their athletic ability as well as their athletic bodies. Mostly, they felt that the sacrifices they made to participate in their sport were well worth their efforts. They were willing to give up social activities to play their sport. They defined their participation as an “honor and a privilege.” Most of our participants had participated in sports continuously for ten to fifteen years. They were now playing at a very high

and competitive level. These women had no intention of dropping out of sports. While other studies looked at team cohesiveness as an indicator of whether someone would drop out of a sport (Spink & Carron, 1994; Ryckman & Hamel, 1992), the participants in this study looked forward to continuing because they just loved the sport. As previous research has shown (Gonçalves, Carvalho, & Light, 2011), there are many factors that maintain women's interest in sports: long periods of time with one sport to foster a sense of belonging and worth, development of relationships on the team, and the development of a relationship with a coach. The women in our study also identified each of these factors. In addition, some of them are already coaching younger women in their sport.

The authors propose that family dynamics, availability of sports programs, and gendered discourses have a combined effect on women's orientation to specific sports, the women's long-term dedication to the sport, and at the level at which they play. The authors offer the following recommendations to organizers of sports-for-peace program.

First Category: "Support"

If women in the region already have the support of their immediate family for playing sports, then the program managers should find ways to encourage continuance of that support, such as inviting families to games. If the women do not have family support, then the program managers could devise a very strong network of support, both among the women on the team, as well as, with the sponsors of the program.

Second Category: "Hurdles"

For sports programs traditionally perceived as being male-dominated sports, the women in these programs might be faced with persistent gender discrimination. Specially trained coaches can help counter some of this criticism. However, when possible, sports such as volleyball or tennis (perhaps viewed as more gender neutral) might be more appropriate sports to promote initially. Furthermore, the burden of funding women's participation in these sports program can alleviate yet another hurdle that women particularly face.

Third Category: "Interest"

Because women in this study took such pride in their identities as sportswomen, that strong personal identity could be nurtured. Usually because of funding, sports programs are initiated and, after the conclusion of the funding cycle, are discontinued. Because these women have had the opportunity to develop an even greater love of sports and grown in their identity as

sportswomen, they should have the ongoing opportunity to continue to participate. The sportswomen could also be encouraged to coach younger women as a way for them to continue to grow the number of women in sports-for-peace programs.

The findings in this study have global implications for inclusion and promotion of women in sporting activities. This research will be of interest to coaches, sportswomen, peace educators, gender educators, as well as practitioners who run sports-for-peace programs. This study gives us insight into the continuing challenges women face in playing sports, as well as, some insights into what keeps them dedicated to their sport. While these women did identify challenges they still faced as sportswomen, they were clearly still dedicated to playing sports as well as encouraging other women to do so. Their overall outlook was very positive. This is encouraging for sports programs looking to include women. This research also points out ways in which women can find fulfillment through playing sports.

Sports-for-Peace programs have a unique opportunity to set an example to the rest of the world in finally bringing more gender-equity to the sports world. As previously stated, research has already shown that even in very developed countries, opportunities to play competitive women's sports largely end with the collegiate realm. The women in our study identified as being female athletes, but that identity would eventually slip into the past tense. They would see the same process occurring with their teammates. Women may want to continue to be competitive but are largely sidelined to the local or regional leagues. Very few opportunities are available for women to play at the professional and competitive level after college age. As noted at the beginning of this article, there are hopeful signs of change. There are individual female athletes who are still pushing the bar higher and higher for women. A recent example of breaking barriers is the first professional and premier promotion fight in the Mixed Martial Arts between two women, Miesha Tate and Ronda Rousey, that was finally brought to the Ultimate Fighting Championship in 2013. Since that barrier breaking, several women have had the chance to fight at that level of competition.

Sports-for-Peace programs also could structure their activities from the very beginning so that no discrepancies exist between the genders. After the completion of the sports programs, activities can be arranged such that both men and women have a chance to continue in the sports they have grown to love. At the same time, women at all levels of sport will set the example, break barriers, and provide opportunities for other women. Pressure from both grassroots

programs and elite sporting events can assist in bringing about needed changes. It can only be hoped that this gender equity in sports will transfer to gender equity in other realms of life.

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